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A WOMEN'S HOSPITAL UNIT IN FRANCE

BY IRENE KING SUMNER

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The Women's Hospital Unit which worked in Antwerp through the bombardment of the town is now installed in the old Château de Tourlaville near Cherbourg. The Hospital Unit came out with the approval of the British Red Cross Society and the authorization of the Order of St. John at the invitation of the French *Croix Rouge*. Through the help of the Women's Imperial Service League we were able to bring beds, bedding, medical stores and an X-ray apparatus.

The Unit is composed of six women doctors and surgeons, fourteen trained nurses and twelve women orderlies. The latter act in various capacities, as cooks, secretary, sanitary inspector, etc., and help with the work in the house. Two have brought and drive their own motor cars.

The head of the medical staff is Dr. Florence Stoney, who is an expert radiographer. The excellent X-ray apparatus is an invaluable aid in the finding of bullets and shrapnel and an arrangement has been added by which they can be localized which is of much assistance to the surgeons. The X-rays are on accumulators and work well.

The château is lovely and has a most interesting history, having once been a royal house. Most of it dates from the sixteenth century but the dungeons and one or two of the towers were built in the eighth century. As can be imagined, it is not conveniently arranged for a hospital. The drainage system is so inadequate and unhealthy that it cannot be used and whenever possible sanitary arrangements are out-of-doors at some distance from the house. Earth closets are provided and the trench system is employed. The French soldiers who act as *Infirmiers* and help with the rough work, dig the trenches and, three times daily, empty the large tins that are provided for use in the house. This system, under the direction of our sanitary inspector, has been found to answer very well. *Faute de mieux*.

All water has to be carried upstairs. The hot water in the wards is heated on small "Primiers," or oil stoves, which need much attention. At first the overworked kitchen had to give us what it could spare but now two huge caldrons in the garden are kept boiling day and night, one contains water for washing up, the other, water for dressings, etc. An ancient system of electric lighting has been made to work and is very convenient, but candles have to be used after ten p.m., as there have been scares of fire. We hope there never may be one but we have



No. 1. CHATEAU DE TOURLAVILLE
 No. 2. GROUP OF NURSES ON STEPS OF CHATEAU
 No. 3. THE AMBULANCE STARTING TO BRING IN THE WOUNDED

had fire-drill and all have exact instructions what to do in case of fire. When the first consignment of very badly wounded was here, it was no uncommon thing to have to tie an artery by candle light.

There is a grand stone staircase with fine iron balustrades. Some of the steps are so worn away that they are quite slanting. This house has a terrible history of crime and murder attached to it; a wicked murder was committed on the stairs and one step is known as *la marche de la main sanglant*, as the mark of a bloody hand is said still to be seen upon it. The sordid history ends with the death of Julien and Marguerite de Ravellet who were beheaded in Paris in 1602. There is a picture of Marguerite in one of the rooms we now use as a ward, and close to it is an exquisite suite of rooms in Henri IV style that are kept locked. One, *la chambre bleue* was Marguerite's boudoir and has a secret staircase connecting it with the room above.

Though the staircase is wide, some of the passages are so narrow that the stretchers had to be cut shorter to enable them to turn corners.

There are four motor ambulances and three touring cars. The wounded arrive at Cherbourg and we are advised by telephone when the ships come in, and go down to meet them. The wounded are divided into *petits blessés* and *gravement blessés*. Our hospital is reserved for the worst cases. Each man is allotted to this or that hospital while he is on the ship, so there is no difficulty in sorting them out as they arrive. The slighter cases are often sent further on by train.

We are so glad to get our wounded under our care at last. Poor fellows! some of them have had so many journeys before they reach us. One soldier, with a very bad compound fracture of the leg, was moved nine times. Is it any wonder that when they get here after eight days' journey, with badly shattered limbs, that amputation is necessary? The terrible cases that arrived when the hospital was first opened were so septic that the whole house stank. The wounds were dressed frequently and disinfected pine sawdust in sterilized gauze bags was found most useful, both as an absorbent dressing and also in mitigating the awful smell. We were glad to have rubber gloves for these very septic cases. After all, the extraordinary thing is how well they do, for we have had very few deaths.

Our Frenchmen are so plucky and ready to laugh and joke directly they are out of pain. Their devotion to us is most touching and we certainly get fond of them.

Through the kindness of friends we have had a large tent given us, which is pitched on an asphalt tennis court close to the house. It was originally intended to be used as an additional ward, but the weather was too bad to allow it and it is now used as a dining-room for

convalescents and as a recreation room. We had several concerts at Christmas time: at one, the soldiers themselves sang and recited, and one of our heroes who has a fine voice sang, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary" in English, and fairly brought down the house. This young soldier has been decorated for valor on the field.

The hospital is under the direct supervision of the Maritime Chef de Santé, who pays us frequent visits and occasionally brings distinguished French surgeons to see the hospital or to witness operations here, and they have cordially praised the work of our women surgeons, in fact our hospital has quite a reputation.

Mrs. St. Claire Stobart, the directress of the hospital, took out the Women's Convoy Corps which worked in Turkey during the Balkan War and then, for the first time I believe, a hospital managed entirely by women, was conducted near the firing line. It has now been established beyond dispute that women are capable of administering and directing hospitals in time of war.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MATERIA MEDICA

By LINETTE A. PARKER, R.N.

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No one knows how the medicinal properties of plants and minerals were first discovered. It has been suggested that man first learned them by observation of wild animals who, when sick, search out special grasses or leaves to eat. The art of healing is as old as man and it is a disputed question whether it is oldest in China, India or Egypt.

China. China claims that its ancient books of medicine date back many centuries before the Christian era but there has never been any definite substantiation of the claim.

Egypt. There is an Egyptian papyrus written sixteen centuries before Christ containing one hundred and ten pages portraying medical life. This is supposed to have been written by a god, Thoth. Thoth was supposed to have special care of the digestive tract and is said to have been the originator of the clyster pipe or enema tube. Perhaps the expression, "Fear God and keep the bowels open," might be attributed to this mythical being. Moses was then at school and his most comprehensive rules of hygienic living, the Mosaic laws of the Bible, were probably learned from the Egyptians. They form a sanitary code which stands the test of modern scientific knowledge. The one name which comes down to us from the Egyptian medical world is I-em-hotep, a physician who lived in Memphis about 3500 B.C. He